This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000778

SIPDIS

FRANKFURT FOR RCO - BARBARA ARMSTRONG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KFRD CVIS LH
SUBJECT: PHOTO-SUBSTITUTED LITHUANIAN PASSPORTS: PROOF IS IN THE MICROPRINTING

REF(S): VILNIUS 0701

¶1. Summary: Good-quality photo-substituted new-generation Lithuanian passports, which have become increasingly popular with citizens of other FSU countries seeking to benefit from Lithuania's membership in the EU, are difficult to detect. Fraudulent documents are generally only distinguishable from legitimate documents by flaws visible under magnification in the print style of the digitized photo and the microprinted name of the passport holder. End summary.

¶2. Since Lithuania's accession into the EU in 2004, Lithuanian passports have become increasingly popular for mala fide applicants from other FSU countries. Photo-substitution of old-style Lithuanian passports is the most commonly seen form of fraud, but border authorities have begun encountering large numbers of good-quality photo- substituted new-generation Lithuanian passports. While Lithuanian authorities note that fraudulent Lithuanian passports are rarely used in Lithuania - where they might be more easily detected - we are concerned that mala fide applicants may seek to use these fraudulent Lithuanian passports to obtain visas to the United States in other countries. To supplement our own anti-fraud efforts, we requested a briefing on these photo substitutions for consular section visa staff, both local and American.

¶3. Captain Pavilas Taskevicius, Chief of the Lithuanian Forensic Document Center, informed us that prior to Lithuanian accession into the EU, roughly 75 percent of those using fraudulent Lithuanian passports were Lithuanian citizens hoping to hide past illegal employment, deportation, or criminal history. Post-EU accession, however, holders of fraudulent Lithuanian passports are rarely Lithuanian. Of the 200 people apprehended by UK authorities attempting to use a fraudulent Lithuanian passport, not one was Lithuanian. According to Taskevicius, mala fide Lithuanian passport holders are generally Moldovan, Ukrainian or Russian. The cost of these fraudulent documents reportedly varies depending on where the document is purchased: the original passport might be purchased in the Lithuanian countryside for 100 litu (roughly $35). The photo-substituted passport may then cost 1,000 pounds in the UK or 1,000 Euro elsewhere in Europe.

¶4. Lithuania began issuing new-generation passports in ¶2003. In the new-generation passport, the passport holder's biodata is recorded on a polycarbonate card inserted into the passport. The advantages of the polycarbonate biodata page are that it is waterproof, durable, and requires special equipment to laser-engrave the information, ideally making the document harder to forge. The disadvantage of the polycarbonate biodata page is that it is stiff and can crack or break. Additionally, the digitized photo is of lower quality, making one to one comparison more difficult.

¶5. The first photo-substituted new-generation passports were detected in 2004. The photo-substitutions were initially very simple: the laminate over the photo was sliced out of the card, and a new photo inserted. A laminate is then pasted over the page to conceal the cuts. The photo-substitution is easily detected as the new laminate covers the security features laser-engraved onto the page. Additionally, the substitute photo will be slightly raised and will partially conceal the UV image of Lithuania. Looking up through the biodata page into the light will also reveal a shadow image of the original photo.

¶6. Forgers have since improved on these early forgeries. Forgers found that by slicing the edge of the biodata card, they could separate the card's composite layers. Peeling back the top layers containing the laser-engraved security features, forgers are able to replace the information on the biodata page. The layers are then glued back together, leaving all security features intact. The forgeries are skillful and of high quality. Taskevicius conceded that the Center's own experts had been unable to duplicate the forgeries as successfully.

¶7. Since the top layer's security features are left intact, a simple fingertip check of the laminate is no longer enough to detect the photo-substitution. The photo-substitution can only be detected by examining the passport under magnification. The laser-engraved photo in a genuine passport is shaded, with no consistent pattern in the printing. Small black particles that are a by-product of the laser toner will also be visible in the genuine passport. In the mala fide document, on the other hand, the substituted photo, printed on a laser printer, will show a clear dot-matrix pattern. Additionally, new-generation Lithuanian passports contain a security feature consisting of the passport holder's name printed in microtext beneath the photo. Forgers have not yet been successful in clearly duplicating the microtext. Use of inkjet printers improves the quality of the photo, but the pattern will still be visible. The best clue, however, according to the forensic expert, will be the quality of the microtext.

¶8. Comment: Lithuania began issuing electronic diplomatic passports with biometric features on May 1. Release of regular electronic passports is scheduled for spring 2006. The electronic passport replaces the polycarbonate biodata page with a laminated paper page. The biometric chip (in this phase containing only the information from the biodata page) should prevent photo substitution in the future. However, until all earlier version passports expire, photo-substitution of Lithuanian passports will remain a concern. End comment.

Kelly